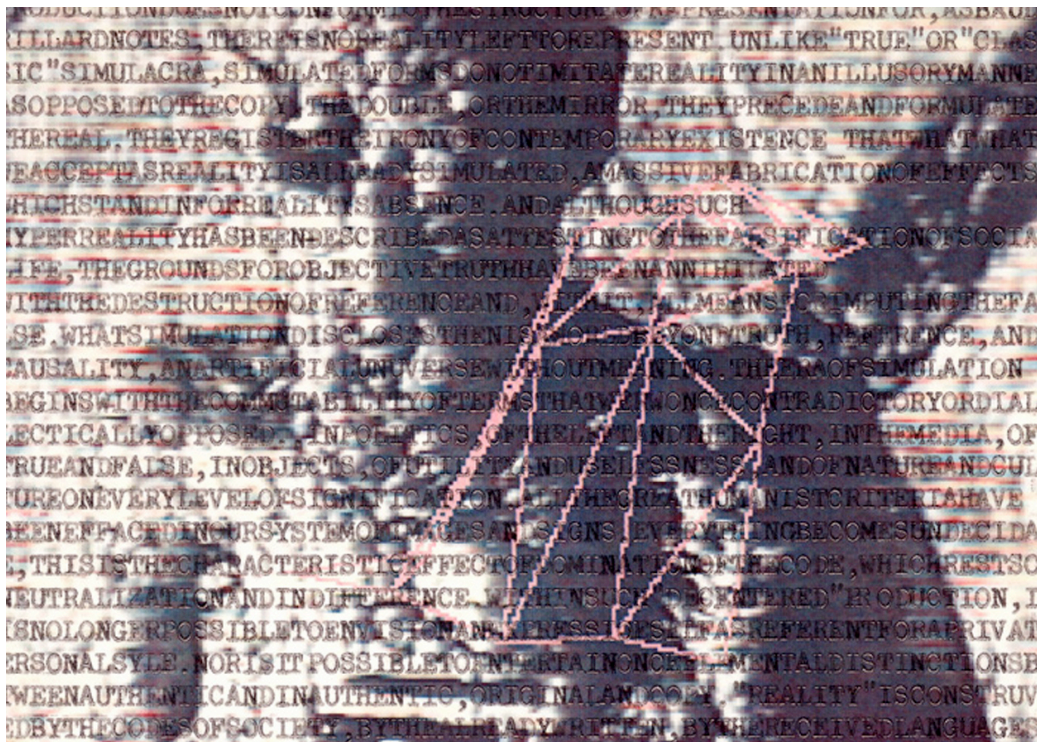


HIGH STYLE

by

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It might be possible to define higher states of consciousness as conditions in which reality is perceived as consisting of more, than that which everyday vision brings to light or in which some higher purpose to life may be observed. Higher states may be thought of as those which bypass discursive rational processes of thinking, or which give greater scope to imaginative vision, or

which raise us toward some greater self-knowledge or some sense of harmony with the cosmos.

All these aspects suggest a merging of one state, if not into another, at least into a more expanded version. It is difficult to be precise about the point at which quantitative difference is such that it marks a qualitative change. Perhaps it is helpful to remember here that quantum theory recognizes that particles manifest themselves as distinct quanta of energy at different frequencies, but are also found as non-localized waves; and these waves may themselves be derived from the plenum or vacuum state, a kind of residue of potential energy. Thus it is possible to say that the distinct states of manifestation are distinguished according to the degree to which that potentiality is energized. To apply this to consciousness would suggest that a possible criterion for making qualitative distinctions is the degree to which the neutral or potential state of consciousness (its quality as awareness of awareness, pure consciousness) is experienced. Thus a clear experience of this by itself constitutes a fourth state of consciousness, as distinct from waking, dreaming and sleeping. This state functions as a gateway to a fifth state in which it is retained as a basis for or backdrop to perception and action. It would then be possible to define a state of consciousness as not merely altered but higher on the grounds that it includes the fourth state, the only known condition of pure meta-awareness.

Consciousness in this condition may be said to be self-referential and self-sufficient. In order to circumvent the current fragmentary view of world and self-built into the structures of language and underpinned by the Cartesian/Newtonian classical model in physics, it would be necessary to develop ways of achieving insight into how the instrument of thought is working. To do this, would be to overcome the tendency for thought to analyze itself in terms of a

presumed separation between the process of thinking and the content of thought that is its product. This phenomenological view clarifies the issue in one sense, namely that thinking is a process consisting of the transformations of thought-events as continuous waves. Thoughts are not distinct from thinking, and similarly I am not distinct from the process by which I recognize myself. Thought, thinking and thinker are a continuity.

Taking it a step further, it makes sense to see thinking, thought, self and experienced world as a non-localized flow of awareness, in which blips occur. Thoughts, locations events, objects or particles (all of which are only relatively circumscribed), remain subject to the interpenetration and modification which characterizes the flow. The term reality indicates an unknown and undefinable totality of flux that is the ground of all things and of the process of thought itself as well as of the movement of intelligent perception.

Thus when consciousness in this condition additionally recognizes this quality as its own basis, it is not only self-referential but also fully integrated within itself and with everything (which is another way of saying the same thing). Here the self is experienced as capacity, rather than existential identity. It is therefore correct to call such consciousness higher precisely because it does not merely amend but radically revises the evaluation of self from bound to boundless. Such consciousness represents a paradigm shift which relativizes all other recognitions of the phenomenon of self or consciousness.

The specific focus of close involvement is sharpened or thrown into relief by the broad scan of detached awareness which can locate contours of individual events precisely because it is aware of the context within which they move. As in the quantum view of physical reality, character and events can be seen as processes in space-time rather than isolated phenomena. Hence, too, we can

view art as a generative set of relations rather than a closed statement. And, as for artist and work, so too for the receiver: aesthetic distance or catharsis seem to require that state of balance between involvement and detachment, experiencing and comprehending, in which the work can be said to resonate with and enliven all the receptive (sensitive) and organizing attributes of awareness, to be actively scripted rather than passively read, in Barthes' sense.

As awareness, it contains the attributes of sensitivity, discrimination and organization; it is the ability of perception *per se* and thus the generative power for activity within new contexts and frames of reference. As frictionless flow of awareness, it is not perceptible but rather the *sine qua non* of perception. It thus inevitably gives rise to other higher states in which increasingly fundamental implicate orders of manifestation are recognized. Indeed, it is such recognition of structural levels or orders in creation that is the only way in which consciousness can develop further. Its awareness of itself as plenum cannot be surpassed or added to. But the latent power of perception which it unfolds may allow it to identify two important aspects of the manifest order of things.

The first of these is the ability to perceive increasingly fundamental structural principles hidden within the ways we think and behave, and to see evidence of similar principles in the implicate orders enfolded within more clearly visible levels of manifestation (aka structuralism). Ultimately this implies being aware of design or formative causation at its most delicate or subtly compacted level—sensing the blueprint for any emergent event, structure or activity in its specificity. Intuitive insight is wholeness before it is worked out.

The second distinct level is one where all material form is found to exist as transformational energy, beyond even any specific blueprint. Here, consciousness as an awareness of its own nature as potential is united with

matter in its ground state as energy filled void - or Unity Consciousness or Vedanta.

Equivalents clearly exist in literature and other arts - for example in the sense that a work of art presents a system in which all parts encode the structure of the whole. Close analysis frequently aims to show that a small extract contains, or has enfolded within it, the essential features of the whole work; whether these are approached stylistically or ideologically. Moreover, appreciating this wholeness is a major element in aesthetic satisfaction, which seems to be shorthand for consciousness functioning in a holistic way, operating at the level at which it can take in the implicate order. Theories of creative activity which are essentially process-models (related to the process philosophies of Whitehead and Bergson), are presented as united or identical - as both flow of form and consciousness of that flow, as both expression and the organic potential for articulation.

In terms of the development of art in recent times, its increasing self-consciousness may be perceived as a movement toward understanding its own nature. Even forms of negation, like anti-art or the undermining of structural assumptions by the multiplication of narrative identity, function ultimately as ways of opening up the capacity for plurality. Many recent theories tend in the same direction, locating the end of art as the capacity for participatory structuring by the viewers in partnership with the art, identifying levels or structures which act as generators.

New ways of understanding involve a change in perspective, and that change is marked by an extended capacity for order.

Structures which have this capacity are emergent in that they lead into higher levels of organization; they can redistribute their energy in an orderly way. Similarly, shifts in consciousness involve a passage through the anarchy of neutrality, giving up the existing framework of self and world, taking in aspects we might prefer to shut out:

But they are the way in which we do more living, and involve the discovery of new organizational energy as we evolve new patterns of response and expression. A work of art presents just this challenge, exploding frameworks and requiring new understanding, as metaphors require us to redraw the contours of parts of language and the concepts and sensations they enfold.

Higher states of consciousness mean more energy in more orderly forms. The orderliness is in the consciousness, in the matter which is organized, and in the organizing relationship. There is no separate envelope of awareness, even in the resting phase of neutrality. Consciousness is participation: in the multiple possibilities of self, in the capacity for play, and perhaps ultimately in the sense that we are the universe's way of becoming conscious of itself.

Altered states of consciousness, whether through dreams, drugs, art or mystical practice, have, whatever their respective shortcomings, always been attractive in the final instance because they offer more, in terms of our experience and understanding of ourselves and our universe. We normally conceive of this as a disclosure of different levels or ways of perceiving, an opening of doors (Blake) or bypassing of valves (Huxley). The model implied here is largely vertical or synchronic: the doors open suddenly and mysteriously under the influence of inspiration or chemicals. The trouble with many such descriptions, whether artistic or mystical, is that ineffability or enthusiasm may convey the value, but often obscure the mechanics.

It is important to focus on the nature of this moment of revelation, and on all its implications; but we should also remember that consciousness is not a static phenomenon, but a historical process in time.

In other words: consciousness is a development - and certainly for individuals this means that it occurs physiologically, and is dependent on everything that has happened before. In order to understand altered states, and to see where they might lead, we therefore need a sense of this development and a model of consciousness which can account for physiological change. Antonin Artaud claims in *Le theatre et son double* that theater is a means of directly influencing the physical organism and altering the quality of our sensibility. He makes the same case for poetry.

You are blasted out of your mental set - experiencing no longer what you thought you knew but more a prelude to knowing. The recognition process therefore involves a *stopping* or unseating, a prying-loose from former bonds of identity, which is uncomfortable, or puzzling, or exciting, or all three.

This is essentially a challenge and a proposal: a challenge to find the context, the mental and physical resources, to cope with the new situation; a proposal that the very gasp of recognition implies that those resources are available, if as yet undefined. Neutrality or witnessing is, as it were, potentially anticipatory or excited: it looks forward to displaying its own capacity in an extended range of action.

Defamiliarizations shift awareness from one set of criteria by which we recognize reality to another.

We need to acknowledge, I think, that these approaches are complementary, even interchangeable, and not mutually exclusive.

The essential characteristics of this transformational quality of consciousness may be grouped into two sets. The first set (A) includes suspension or extreme refinement of physical activity, suspension of judgment (indifference, neutrality), extension of perceptual boundaries (including sensitivity to language), and consciousness of being conscious (meta-awareness). The second set (B) includes sense of unity or wholeness (self-work/world, all aspects of work, organic understanding), modification of evaluation of self, potential for creating form (readiness for voluntary acts, awareness of multiple possibilities, spontaneity), and conjunction of distance and involvement. Of these criteria, the first set has mainly to do with a temporary or synchronic condition; the second set involves a more active and continuous situation. But experience probably repeated experience: A is necessary in order to produce B.

De-familiarization can be understood as methods of instituting A, which is itself a preparation for, and almost inevitable instigator of, B.

Evidence for the existence of such conditions is not hard to find, provided we assume that the entire Vedic, Taoist and Buddhist traditions are not based on mere speculation, or that Plotinus, Eckhart, Boehme, Goethe, the English Romantics and the Symbolists are not entirely deluded about the nature of their experience.

Much modern art comments on its own compositional process, thereby producing a level of meta-awareness which runs along throughout, always at least implicitly - and often overtly - weighing up the possibilities for what comes next. Once activated, awareness in this condition goes into overdrive in

which it is able to pick up information from many different channels simultaneously. Its co-ordinates of expectation are significantly enlarged.

An extremely pliable state of consciousness, resting on the basis of relaxed (extended) attentiveness, may thus become available; and it is within this elastic framework-ideally constituted both between artist and audience and within the individual awareness of each participant-that the art takes place. When this does occur, even to a limited degree, one has, not surprisingly, an uplifting experience, which brings a sense of communion and completeness. Again, this is a major part of what thinkers like Artaud have described as the sacred, ritualistic or Shamanistic function. We are close here to participation in the divine play of forms, the freedom to perceive relationships in the making, if we stop blocking and eliminate our resistance to this psychic process of wholeness and holiness.

Mindfulness expands awareness to many possible mental event-sensations, thoughts, memories, emotions, and perceptions as they occur over time. The natural tendency is to habituate to the world surrounding one, to substitute abstract cognitive patterns or perceptual preconceptions for the raw sensory experience. The practice of mindfulness is purposeful dishabituating: to face the bare facts of experience, seeing each event as though occurring for the first time. The means for dishabituating is continual observation of the first phase of perception when the mind is in a *receptive*, rather than reactive, state.

Thus, as opposed to the conceptual nature of everyday perception - with its inherent categorization - there is a shift to a more direct mode of perception which entails sensory experience. Such an uncoupling of thought from perception is attained through the deautomatization of the perceptual process,

whereby more emphasis is placed on recording the perceptual world than on constructing it.

The technique of high art is to make objects unfamiliar, to make form difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception, because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.

In his essay *On some Motifs in Baudelaire*, Walter Benjamin remarks:

Since the end of the last century, philosophy has made a series of attempts to lay hold of the true experience as opposed to the kind that manifests itself in the standardized, denatured life of the civilized masses. It is customary to classify these efforts under the heading of a philosophy of life. Their point of departure, understandably enough, was not man's life in society. What they invoked was poetry, preferably nature, and, finally and most emphatically, the age of myths.

The concern here is to shift the criterion of truth and significance away from that which is central to rationalist and pragmatic ways of thinking, to shift the center of reality to a new locus in a depth separate from the surfaces of material or social human phenomena.

The mythic stratum of life - which enters and transforms the ordinary domain of existence - therefore is opposed to the pragmatic considerations of advantage and security. It breaks into that domain disruptively and rapturously. In contrast to the pedestrian values of the civilized masses, it is an ecstasy and an intoxication.

The fundamental idea behind the interpretation of enraptured, ecstatic and intoxicated states - in a tradition which turns toward a hidden mythic or

elemental level for its truth - is that this alteration of consciousness is a break with the singular level of unified world. It is not a more fluid, swifter, less inhibited movement through the articulations of one continuous reality, like a renewed melody in a single key, but the sound of new notes from a quite different key - one with a deeper and more universal tone. The boundaries which make up the various territories of the horizontal plane of objective or historical knowledge are transcended by their relation to the depth of the elemental and the mythic representations by which we attempt to grasp it.

All branches of learning in this light begin to resemble the compositions of poetry. They are metaphors or translations of something both separate from them, yet perhaps alive in the spirit which animates them. As Benjamin observes in his essay on Surrealism, the dialectics of intoxication are indeed curious. Is not perhaps all ecstasy in one world humiliating sobriety in that complementary to it?

The Surrealist understanding of the subconscious clearly posits it as an extension of the human sphere - not an alternative to it. The high mythic domain is where person not only transcends the narrow and bogus values of bourgeois individuality, but also frees himself from all the desires of security, comfort, pleasure and happiness which animate the familiar experience of everyday life. For the Surrealists, the subconscious was merely the home of a more vivid, vibrant and unfettered version of those desires. Although there is a real difference between the desires uncovered by revelation of subconscious contents of the mind and personality and that of the bourgeois domain, that difference does not involve breaking out into a realm which disrupts the integrity of the desiring subject. Surrealism simply subverts the false limits constructed about the enfeebled and conventionalized image of the bourgeois

individual as defined by the relations and demands of a competitive economy and administrative structure.

Concerning the Surrealists, Benjamin notes how their emphasis on ecstatic experience as an opposition to the domain of purposes does indeed dissolve away the idea of the self that was determined by it. Yet he sees an important dialectical element in their procedure here: this loosening of the self by intoxication is, at the same time, precisely the fruitful, living experience that allowed the Surrealists to step outside the domain of intoxication. This is all-important to Benjamin, for writing in 1929, the aspect of their Surreal work which strikes him as embodying its principal value is its place in the political awareness and struggle of socialist resistance to the rising threat of Fascism. The Surreal dialectical step beyond intoxication - which is reached by entering into it - is the beginning of a new realm of purposes directed toward the revolutionary transformation of social reality. This means that the intoxicated rapture of Surreal poetry must be carried over beyond the limited space of a momentary ecstasy, and sustain a renewed sense of the rights and potentials to be redeemed in all levels of actual human life.

Their Surreal task was to step beyond the imaginative rejection of bourgeois knowledge - a rejection pursued into the alternative domains of art, literature, the occult, and drug-induced raptures - and bring this Surreal perspective to bear on the irrational self-contradictions of an ideology which insists on calling itself rationalism. The danger to which Surrealists threaten their ability to complete this task lies in the pernicious romantic prejudices which lead to fascination with high alternatives as objects of desire and pursuit for their own sake. Are they emphasized *instead* as the renewed possibilities of consciousness in a new political reality? Or are they a place of flight and complacent illusion?

Understanding this is the key to all Benjamin has to say about the dialectic of intoxication:

Any serious exploration of occult, surrealistic, phantasmagoric gifts and phenomena presupposes a dialectical intertwinement to which a romantic turn of mind is impervious. For histrionic or fanatical stress on the mysterious side of the mysterious takes us no further; we penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognize it in the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as every day. The most passionate investigation of telepathic phenomena, for example, will not teach us half as much about reading (which is an eminently telepathic process), as the profane illumination of reading about telepathic phenomena. And the most passionate investigation of the hashish trance will not teach us half as much about thinking (which is eminently narcotic), as the profane illumination of thinking about the hashish trance.

The validity of exploration of such altered states of consciousness depends on the capacity to overcome that romantic attribution of separate reality which enthralls the mind and takes us no further. That in turn depends on the understanding that the subject experiencing an altered state of consciousness remains in principle the same; the consciousness is essentially that of the same person, and the content of consciousness, the ideas and dreams, are those of the same person also, albeit revealed at a heightened level of intensity by the removal of inhibiting agencies and habits of mind.

In *Les Paradis artificiels*, Baudelaire affirms the closeness of the intoxicated state of the norm which reigns in the drug-taker's life: *Dans ses Confessions, De Quincey affirme avec raison que l'opium... n excite [l'homme]... que dans sa voie naturelle, et qu'ainsi, pour juger les merveilles de l'opium...*

It is on this basis that Benjamin can demand that the revelations of ecstatic visions be made subject to the same criteria of knowledge as those of a sober state - just as the conventions of conformist ideology must be treated to the same skepticism as one applies to raptures and dreams. For ecstatic experience has two phases. First it is a liberation, a breaking free of an ordinary place cramped among the oppressive desiderata of individual existence. That is an intoxication beyond all intoxications, an unleashing that burst every bond. But it is also an experience which brings another sphere to light, uniting one with a larger reality where becomes melted together with the universe - as though a wave has glided back into the ocean.

In that sense, high ecstatic courage means self-abandonment. Highness breaks away from the brief life of an individual and the enclosed existence one knows, to hatch out for flights beyond bounds. The things of the narrow ego world therefore undergo a reduction in significance.

This high ecstasy of self-forgetting weakens the links of consciousness to a domain of rational purposes and breaks loose from identities anchored there. Consequently, strength accumulates in the reality and attraction of what lies beyond, even though it may strike the person looking on from outside as strangely abstract and nebulous. Yet this intoxication is the construction of a higher unified world where there is no unity in the reigning order of things.